

Annual Preview

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Sea

AND PACIFIC MOTOR BOAT

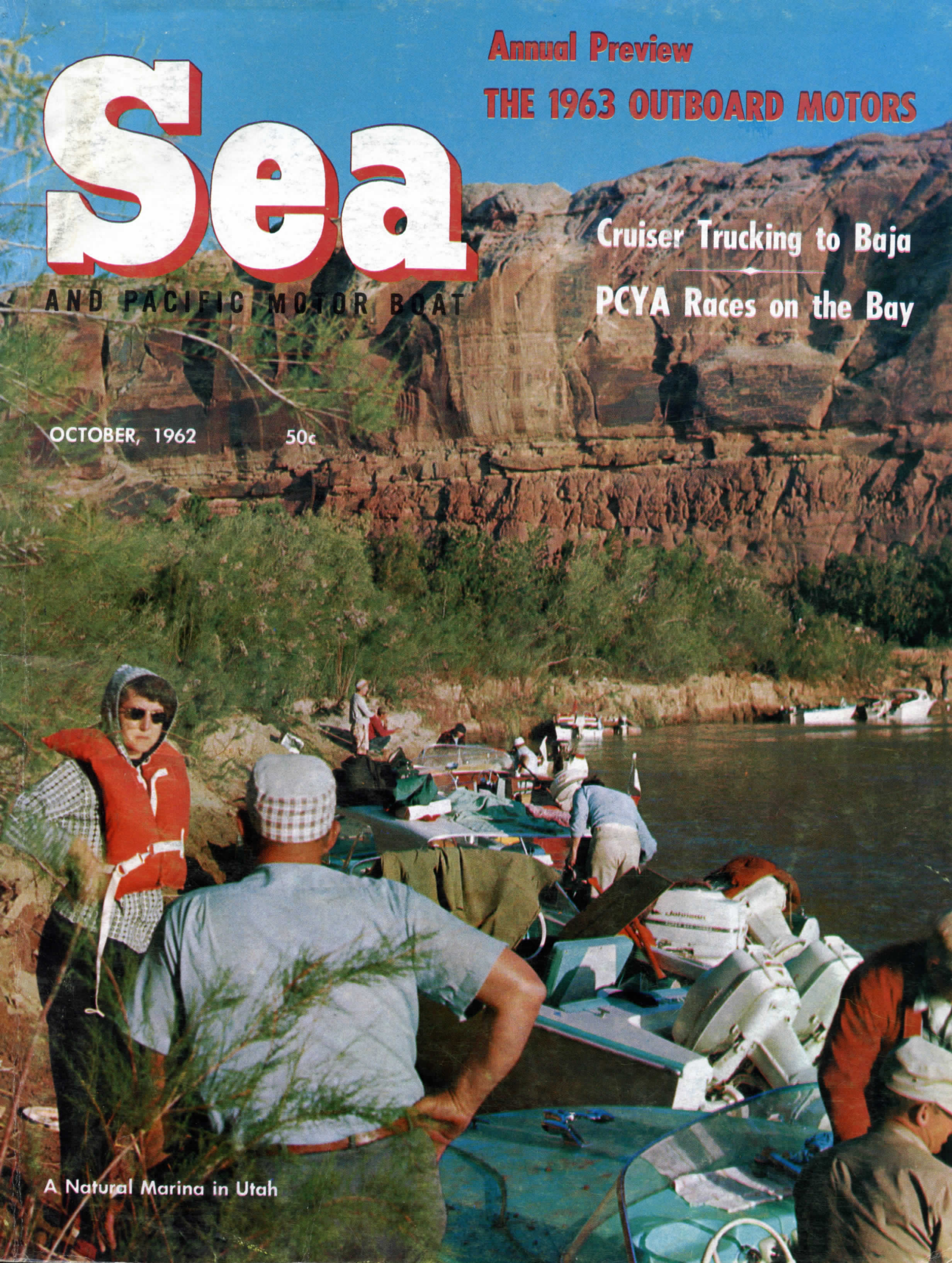
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Small Boat, Small Family and Santa Cruz Island

Story and photos by Bonnie Davidson

A VOYAGE TO THE CHANNEL ISLANDS may not be considered the ideal and best plan for a first cruise aboard a small boat. It can be done safely and happily, however, if you have a few credits to balance the debits on the log book. Though our crew was inexperienced—the children, Douglas, 11, and Julie, 4, and myself—my husband Glenn knew the Channel Islands well and boats even better. Our boat is small, a 24-ft. Islander sloop, but sturdy and quite seaworthy. And though the Santa Barbara Channel is known for its confused, heavy seas and walloping winds, the summer months (June through September) are generally calm enough to permit safe crossing. And, if you know the islands as Glenn did, you know which is least subject to violent weather and which anchorages are protected from what kind of weather.

Accordingly, the four of us set sail aboard *Token* for Santa Cruz Island, situated at the northwest end of the Channel Island chain.

An excellent retreat for the nature lover, Santa Cruz is one of the two most frequently visited islands in the eight-island group. In spite of this, one of its distinctions derives from the almost total lack of shore facilities, and the absence of moorings, which test both the recreative resources of the yachtsman and his practical knowledge of anchoring. The 21-mile-long island lies somewhat in the lee of Pt. Arguello and Pt. Conception where the westerlies are gathered and deflected to San Miguel, "the island that is blowing away." Santa Cruz lies almost due east and west and the northern side (the closest one to the mainland) is protected from the west below Pt. Diablo, making Fry's Harbor and Pelican Harbor the two most favored by yachtsmen in the summer months. From Santa Barbara it is 21½ miles in a southern direction to Pelican. From Los Angeles Harbor a dead beat some 83 miles almost due west puts you at Santa Cruz, jewel of the northern Channel Islands.

Santa Cruz boasts a large inland valley where, 80 years ago, Justinian Caire settled with his family and established a stock ranch and an excellent vineyard. The old winery and chapel still stand and the sheep and cattle ranch remains in operation. Caire's descendants, Francis Gherini of Oxnard and Pier Gherini of Santa Barbara still own the eastern

fifth of the island. Permission to go ashore at Smugglers and Scorpion anchorages may be obtained by writing either of them. The remaining four-fifths of the island is privately owned and permission to land must be obtained from E. L. Stanton's Santa Cruz Island Co. in Long Beach, Calif. No fires can be built ashore, and no plants or animals destroyed. Courtesy and caution are the by-words ashore, for you are,

in effect, guests of the owners when you set foot on land.

The best months for crossing the channel in a small boat the size of ours are from June through September. The northeasterly Santana winds in winter funnel through the canyons at 40 - 90 mph and across the Santa Barbara channel to hit the exposed anchorages of the north side of Santa Cruz. Thus, a small boat skipper should carefully select the time of year for his cruise. Power boats and larger sailing craft are not so restricted in their crossing season, it should be noted. It is possible to power over to the south side of Santa Cruz in winter and find relatively calm, sunny weather. (Providing, of course, that mainland weather reports, especially regarding conditions at Pt. Arguello and Pt. Conception are favorable.)



For their first cruise, the Davidson family, including two small children, sailed from Santa Barbara to Santa Cruz Island aboard *Token*, their compact 24-ft. Islander sloop.

We planned our family Santa Cruz cruise for the last two weeks of August, which turned out to be ideal with light winds, medium swell and little fog.

We left Santa Barbara at 8:30 on a flat-calm, foggy Monday morning. We would have preferred sailing but would have had to wait until noon for the wind, which would have gotten us over to Fry's Harbor late in the day. On our first cruise an early, broad-daylight arrival at Santa Cruz seemed advisable.

When we eased into Fry's we found 25 boats from the Los Angeles Power Squadron swinging at anchor. By chance skipper Glenn's favorite anchoring spot beneath the west cliff on the edge of the kelp was not taken. We dropped a 22-lb. Danforth to seaward off the stern and fed out 150 ft. of half-inch nylon line. The anchor stuck fast in the sand just outside the kelp with the white line clearly visible to the bottom 30 feet below. The eight-pound Danforth was dropped shoreward off the bow with plenty of scope to allow for the prevailing heavy afternoon wind blowing from the canyon.

Of the three harbors, Pelican, Ladies' and Fry's, the last offers the best night's sleep in summer, because Pt. Diablo affords excellent protection from the westerly swells, and also the harbor itself reaches in a bit under the west cliff for further shelter. Some yachtsmen prefer the midnight roll of wide-open Pelican to the afternoon wind of Fry's. However, we liked Fry's: its waters were quiet, its beach wide, its canyon sheltered and easy to ascend, at least for the first two miles. The beach is pebbly, not sandy—hard on skiffs and bare feet. Fry's is a good place for dinghy sailing, too, speaking of skiffs. I would have sailed our 8-ft. Sea Shell dinghy except the rig had been left behind. This is on the list for next time.

The first week of our trip was spent in Fry's, exploring the canyon and its derelict camp, swimming in the harbor, rowing up and down the coast in the quiet morning sea, and visiting with other boaters. The rock for the Santa Barbara breakwater was quarried from the east cliff in 1928, and from its exposed face an old derrick juts over the water from a height of 50 feet. At my son's urging, he and I hiked up to this point along crumbling ledges and photographed the harbor. Never again! The ascent of the creek canyon and the sheep trails are a sufficient challenge to the hiker in me.

Before the Power Squadron left Fry's, one of the group gave us abalone and sea bass, both delicacies and a most welcome change from our meals "in the round." We all tried fishing, but the trouble was, there were too many fish! For three days the harbor was thick with silver streams of sardines or anchovies gliding and darting under our hull. They don't bite, and they drive out the biters. This immense school was discovered by three young seals, crafty and comic, whose strategy was to converge on their quarry and drive them into a ring of foaming, thrashing panic. The resultant turbulence rocked *Token*. In fact, the seals found that she made a good backboard for charging the sardines.

Rowing is a relaxing sport, in or out of the harbor. One can ride the kelp against the cliff and gaze down into a magical, unreal land where mustard-colored kelp grows up from the bottom, easing through glassy green sunlit water. Schools of fish meander through the kelp stalks; an occasional brilliant garibaldi blossoms forth; and coral or purple starfish cling to the moss-covered rocks on the bottom and the cliffs. One can row up or down the coast in the morning and hear the blowholes spout and the caves rumble with each gently rising swell. Below Fry's is a secluded rockbound cove, too small for anchoring but nice for rowing and beaching.

If the seals are nature's comedians, the wild sheep of Santa Cruz are her philosophers, strolling, munching, gazing and bleating, following their leader along improbable ledges from which they never tumble. The rams seem like the kings of the island, with their twice-curved horns above a cool scowl, their rag-tag robes and their delicate noses and hooves. I remember being impressed with the simplicity, peace and freedom of their lives, and then turning to my galley mess.

Cooking aboard isn't really complicated: it merely seems that way because I must use the stairway and part of the cockpit for a work table, thereby blocking the main hatchway until dinner is over.

In order to spend as little time as possible in the galley, I made complete menus in advance, and kept a record of all stores with each item numbered as to location.

While I cleared the galley, Glenn would secure the square canvas cover over the cockpit. The children's sleeping gear is passed up to the cockpit, (we have pre-empted the forward bunks for stowage) including boards to cover the well, air mattresses, sleeping bags, pillows, crackers and games. Eventually, peace would descend, nightly.

We chose a lovely morning to motor up to Ladies' harbor, and spent a quiet day and night. Glenn's log reads, "Stern anchor on beach with 100 ft. on stern and 100 ft. foreward, in about 10 - 12 ft. of water. Slight surge with wind coming from the N. E., evidently the normal west wind is bouncing off the cliffs into the mouth of the harbor." Ladies' has been described by Duncan Gleason in his *Islands and Ports of California* as "an enchanting little bight," and so she is. Her two creek canyons are reminiscent of some Tahitian grotto, with rocky waterfalls, ferns and overhanging oaks and sycamores. The beach is rich in driftwood, from which the children built a two-story fort in a cleft of the rocks. The brown castaway kelp gave off a pungent smell in the bright quiet air, and we discovered that the mysterious basins hollowed therein were formed by the rooting snouts of a large spotted wild sow and her babies.

Ladies' is enchanting, and she is moody. By ten o'clock the following morning *Token* was swinging at her anchors like a drunken compass, tossed by the surge as it bounced off the east cliff, across to the beach and back out to sea. The driftwood fort had washed out. The stern anchor had washed out. We secured the stern line to a high rock, but had not enough chain to keep the line from chafing on the rocky beach. The skipper decided to return to Fry's. Later that day we learned from our only neighbor in Fry's that

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Fry's Harbor is one of the most popular summertime anchorages at Santa Cruz. It is fairly well protected and will accommodate a large number of boats at anchor.



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Small-Boating to Santa Cruz Island

(Continued from page 41)

he had tried Ladies' later in the day and found it sloppy and blowing.

That night the afternoon wind refused to die, blowing a steady 25 knots or so all night, as I lay in my bunk listening to the rising pitch of the wind in the rigging and picturing the shape of next morning's sea. All the islands have a reputation for bluster which our favorable weather has not dispelled.

The following morning we hoisted sail for the first time and ran down to Pelican on a zephyr. After our days of solitude, I was surprised at the sight of three or four large yachts in the harbor. They had had no wind the night before, although the two harbors are only three miles apart by sea. Pelican's high basalt cliffs form a wide U open to the north and east, with the west cliff extending far enough to protect the harbor from most of the westerly wind and swell. Pelican has no canyon wind to try to avoid and she has no canyon beach. A skiff can be rowed up to a shelf in the cliff to discharge passengers.

From this shelf a trail leads up the cliff to a ridge overlooking the harbor and to the wistful remains of summer cottages. From these sites the trail continues either down the other side of the ridge to the creek canyon and a welcome pool and waterfall, or up past dying fig trees to a pine grove commanding a view of the harbor and the northward curving coast of Santa Cruz as far as Chinese Harbor. Not a road crosses the vision, not a telegraph pole, not a billboard, not a house. To me this virgin view is a miracle, only 83 nautical miles from Los Angeles. On a clear day you can see the mainland, if you care to look.

The silence continually delighted me and seemed to calm the children. We often walked along the creek bed beneath the fragrant, dusty eucalyptus, hearing only the distant clatter of the pebbles in the surf.

The cliffs of Pelican would make a fine watercolor subject. Here are swirling strata of reds, tans and beiges before which blue-black ravens circle. There are lacy overhangs of extruded lava, an ancient tapestry beneath the dry oaks and crumbling hills grazed bare by the wild sheep.

Race day dawned hot and clear. We decided to get underway as soon as there was a little wind rather than waiting for the 2 p.m. race start. A breeze sprang up at 11:45 so we hoisted sail and made a sunny crossing with steady breeze, reaching the mile buoy off Santa Barbara in four hours, 20 minutes. We were followed by a killer whale who deserted us as we passed another crosser. The racers caught a wind four or five miles out, so we would have made some time on our crossing had we waited.

Our first family cruise was a tremendous success because of the skipper's forbearance and seamanship, the mate's determination, the children's adaptability, the temperance of the weather and the serene beauty of Santa Cruz Island. It was such a success, in fact, that with a little more cruising experience under our belts, we hope to venture around the far side of Santa Cruz and put into some of the anchorages there.

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